

Willamette American Heritage River Partnership

STATE OF THE RIVER 2001



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River Facts

The River

The Willamette River has 13 major tributaries and drains approximately 12,000 square miles, almost one eighth of Oregon's total area.

The Willamette River is the tenth largest river in the continental U. S. in total discharge, with over 24 million acre-feet annually.

The 187 mile mainstem of the Willamette River extends from its source south of Eugene, northward to the Columbia River at Portland. There are approximately 16,000 total stream miles in the basin.

Economics of the Basin

The Willamette River basin is the fastest growing and most economically developed region of the state.

The Port of Portland is the fourth largest port on the west coast of the continental United States (based on tonnage of foreign waterborne trade). There are 81,000 jobs related to maritime activity in the Portland and Vancouver area. In 2000, this resulted in:

- \$1.2 billion in wages
- \$1.1 billion in business revenue

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RIVER PROFILE

The Willamette basin has long been a place of beauty, where the meandering Willamette River and its tributaries were surrounded by diverse landscapes of wetlands, prairies and forests. Native American inhabitants depended on the river and land for food, clothing, tools, transportation and spiritual sustenance. Historians believe these early residents had several names for this river that was their life-line. One of those names was River of Life.

In the early 19th century, the basin's immense natural wealth began to draw explorers, trappers, traders and homesteaders across the Oregon Trail. The population grew and great changes came to the River of Life and the land surrounding it.

The Willamette basin is still a place of beauty, diversity and sustenance. Its multiple resources and myriad uses still reflect the high quality of life for which Oregon is celebrated. The basin encompasses a variety of landscapes; rivers and streams, wetlands and riparian areas, cultivated valleys, developed urban areas and forested uplands. But not all is well. Our use of the basin's natural resources has taken a toll over the years. Despite impressive environmental gains, the basin still faces many challenges:

- At least 1,400 stream miles violate state water quality standards established under the Clean Water Act. The Oregon Health Division has issued health advisories regarding the risks of eating certain fish caught in the Willamette River mainstem.
- Seventeen plant and animal species are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. Wild spring Chinook populations have declined from historic levels of around 300,000 to recent levels of 3,000.
- Formerly widespread habitat types have declined dramatically, jeopardizing native plants and wildlife. Over 99 percent of the original bottomland forest have been lost.
- In summer, nearly all surface water has been appropriated through the state's water rights system, with little available for new uses.

The Willamette River will be what we - all the basin inhabitants - make it. Concerned citizens have made significant progress before. In the 1930s and again in the 1970s, public action resulted in steps to reduce pollution and improve water quality in the Willamette River. Environmental awareness has continued to grow since that time and many important programs are in place to address basin issues. However, a comprehensive, integrated approach and participation by all citizens are now required. We need focused, concerted action.

Many tough choices remain, and a much greater commitment is needed if we are to fulfill our responsibility to the next generation. If we do not act decisively and swiftly, the Willamette River we love will slip away. At the beginning of this new century, we have both the opportunity and the obligation to pledge this generation's best efforts to restore the health of the Willamette basin.

River Facts

(Continued from page 1)

- \$135 million in state and local taxes

Combined agricultural, forestry and business activity in the basin constitutes nearly three-quarters of Oregon's economic output. Approximately one half of Oregon's \$3 billion total agricultural sales is produced by Willamette basin farms.

Cities and Local Government Groups in the Willamette River basin

- Nine of the 20 largest cities in Oregon are on the banks of the Willamette River.
- Number of cities in basin: about 100
- Number of counties: 10
- Number of watershed councils: 27
- Number of soil and water conservation districts: 10

Population in the Willamette River basin

- Pre 1850 population: less than 15,000
- Estimated current population: 2.3 million (70 percent of Oregon's population)
- Projected 2050 population: 4 million

Willamette Basin Land Use

- Forest: 62%
- Agricultural: 33%
- Urban: 5%
- 41% of basin lands are publicly held, mostly in the mountains of the Coast Range on the west, and the Cascades, on the east.

Willamette American Heritage River Accomplishments

1. Connected Communities With Federal Partners

The River Navigator facilitated the interaction of a federal agency and local watershed organization. The Planning Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided technical habitat restoration support to an effort by the McKenzie Watershed Council to conserve and protect the confluence of the McKenzie and Willamette River.

Connecting People to the River: Mid-Willamette Valley communities worked with the state legislature to authorize a multi-objectives and natural functioning site study for increasing commercial tour boat use of the River. State funding for the study is only available if federal funds are also available. Local officials, the River Navigator and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have developed a proposal for joint funding of the study.

2. Supported Integrated Planning at the Regional Level

The Willamette Restoration Initiative (WRI), the primary community partner for the Willamette River, has issued a report of 27 critical actions for restoring the health of the watershed. The WRI Executive Director, WRI Board members, the River Navigator, and other federal and state agency partners are identifying the steps and resources needed to implement those actions.

3. Expanded Communication and Education Networks

The Willamette River community partners are planning a self-guided tour of habitat and water quality restoration projects throughout the Willamette watershed. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is supporting the design, installation and promotion of the sites. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers are also preparing interpretive signs at their facilities in the basin. A brochure, tour map and promotional activities will provide recognition for the project participants and awareness of the opportunities for the public.



Community Priority Projects

Cities all along the Willamette River have identified both short-term and long-term river-related projects for their communities. Watershed councils in the basin have also identified a critical need for additional support. Priority projects for AHR assistance and the estimated targeted funding level for this fiscal year are listed below (where known).

1. Urban Communities:

Portland/Metro: Acquisition and restoration of Rock Island, a natural area along the Willamette identified as a critical component of the Metro area's green spaces program.: \$200,000

Salem: Construction of North Salem Environmental Education Center, a high-school based community and education center in the heart of Oregon's capital that will share information and sponsor local restoration projects: \$50,000

Independence: Independence is basing its downtown redevelopment on a re-invigorated relationship with the Willamette. This involves improving its museum, enlarging its downtown river park, and creating new river interaction opportunities through river- and bike-trail connections with its downstream neighbor, Salem. The museum project will require: \$70,000 - \$100,000. Independence and Salem have also requested a study to determine the feasibility for commercial riverboat operations between the two cities: \$125,000

Albany: Albany is improving its connections with the Willamette by seeking additional parklands and improving access (\$570,000). In addition, the City is restoring a creek in its city limits in order to protect and increase endangered salmon runs: \$100,000

Other Cities: A number of other cities have identified assistance needs for such projects as stream bank protection, riverfront development and improved river access, including Harrisburg, Keizer, and Canby. Such projects reflect approximately \$300,000 of need based on preliminary cost estimates.

2. Watershed Group Support

There are 14 formally-recognized watershed councils in the Willamette basin that have key responsibilities for bringing together landowners, businesses, environmental groups, agencies and other stakeholders at the local level to assess watershed conditions, develop action plans, and implement priority projects on-the-ground. With a new understanding of the scope of Willamette water quality problems and the listing of salmon and steelhead under the federal Endangered Species Act, the work of the councils has mushroomed, but their funding has not. There is an estimated \$500,000 shortfall needed to hire additional project staff for partnering and monitoring, as well as budget oversight and administration.

3. Community Outreach and Communication

Willamette Basin Restoration Sign Network: This sign-and-map network would be modeled after the Willamette basin's "wine country" self-guided tours. The public could either follow the map to sites where they could view salmon or waterfowl and also see projects underway to protect them; or simply encounter the signs throughout the basin as they bike or picnic. \$10,000 of seed funding has been obtained; to fully implement the concept would require approximately \$100,000.

River City Connections Forums: There is a pressing need to have the very active and progressive communities along the Willamette share their individual perspectives to build a collective Willamette River vision. There is a proliferation of plans and proposals regarding the river in this fastest-growing area of the state. However, there are also substantial issues regarding environmental protection and funding that may frustrate these expectations. Cities need an information-rich forum around which to convene and build the necessary networks for success. The forum or forums would require approximately \$30,000-\$50,000 to plan and support.

What We Need To Succeed

In general, for success in the Willamette basin, the American Heritage River Initiative must develop the “punch” and reputation for securing substantial federal funds to match burgeoning local efforts. Clear preferences of AHR projects in federal grant programs and improved communication between federal program managers and AHR staff locally must continue and expand. . In addition, the AHR designation could more directly benefit the region if there was separate appropriated funding for AHR community projects or funding set aside in current grant programs for AHR community projects.

Fundamental to the ability to implement the critical actions and the community projects is funding. A key recommendation included in the WRI report is “Begin the process of establishing a sound restoration investment plan for the basin by clearly identifying existing assets and forecasting future needs and funding sources.” Through an effective AHR initiative, the River Navigator can make a significant contribution in this task. The River Navigator will be examining and pursuing a wide range of federal and private funding sources for identified regional and local community priorities

Specifically, the Willamette basin has the following needs where the AHR Initiative should play a leadership role.

1. Local community needs:

- Improving connections to the river, including parks, boating facilities and commercial development along the river. Applicable to Portland, Oregon City, Salem, Independence, Albany, Corvallis, Harrisburg and Springfield. Potential sources are diverse and include Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), TEA-21, and Urban Renewal.
- Recreational use along the river and trail development between communities. A trail is proposed to connect the Corvallis, Albany, Independence, Salem communities. Other communities (including Portland) are proposing trail segments. The National Park Service is targeted for trail planning assistance with funding from Land and Water Conservation Fund.
- Habitat protection and greenspaces. Many communities have proposals. Funding sources include NPS, USFWS, NOAA, NMFS, EPA, ACE, TEA-21 and USFS.
- Historic preservation and restoration. Most applicable to Oregon City, Independence.
- Art and education. Communities wish to use art and education programs to enhance the livability of their community. Potential funding sources include Council of the Humanities, TEA-21, EPA, and Education.
- Community facilities such as low cost housing, libraries and museums. Most applicable to smaller communities along the river. Funding sources would be diverse.

2. Needs identified by AHR Community Partners through the *Willamette Restoration Strategy* recommendations (summarized below).

- Inventory map and conserve priority fish and wildlife habitats in the basin. Support funding for on-the-ground protection projects. There are several federal programs with the potential to provide the needed funding. Programs which have not been regularly funded include the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Challenge21, and Forest Legacy.
- Build partnerships with private land owners by creating new stewardship pathways through agreements and incentives. It will be important to improve the delivery mechanisms for incentive programs, especially the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).
- Sources for funding and implementing watershed action plans are needed. One suggestion for increasing capability at the local level is by creating watershed (technical and administrative) assistance teams. Watershed Councils and Conservation Districts are the primary means for implementing watershed improvements, yet they have very little capability to deal with detailed regulations and complex natural habitats. Federal agencies often have a large number of employees with the needed technical and administrative skills. However, they may not be available to assist due to lack of funding for that task.
- Coordinate and integrate major regulatory programs and responses to them. Federal agency regulations may have overlapping purposes and regulations. For example, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act share some goals, but have some differences in how they are administered. Greater coordination and consistency between these programs will assist local governments ability to meet their goals and regulatory requirements.
- Support the U.S. Corps of Engineers’ ongoing assessment of flood control reservoir operation needed to address streamflow issues. Concurrently, support is needed for basinwide scientific investigations of how to restore floodplain function.
- Support improvements for anadromous fisheries recovery. Primary actions include establishing a basinwide salmonid recovery coordinating council, making adjustments to hatchery and harvest management systems and improved passage at dams, culverts and water diversions.

Willamette American Heritage River Partnership

Primary oversight of the American Heritage Rivers Partnership is provided by the Willamette Restoration Initiative (WRI). The partnership with WRI is exhibited by the focus on WRI developed recommendations included in the 'What We Need to Succeed' section of this report.

A 'Community Partners' group, a sub-component of WRI, has been formed to provide guidance for the river navigator and AHR activities. The Community Partners group includes representatives from WRI, federal, state and local government, private citizens, and watershed councils.

The heart of the AHR Initiative is locally driven and designed solutions. The Willamette River Navigator has worked with local communities to identify their priority projects and find funding.

Willamette communities and organizations the River Navigator is working with include:

- City of Albany
- City of Canby
- City of Corvallis
- City of Harrisburg
- City of Independence
- City of Portland
- Oregon State Parks
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- Paddle Oregon - A Century on the Willamette
- Salem Convention and Visitors Association
- Springfield Renaissance
- Willamette Provincial Advisory Committee
- Willamette Restoration Initiative
- Willamette Riverkeeper
- Willamette Urban Watershed Network



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